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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review completed

Top Secret

25X1

125

13 February 1973

25X1

Page Denied

25X1

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

Page

SOUTH VIETNAM

1

Route 14 is still blocked and Kontum City still isolated.

25X1

The prospect of political struggle with the Communists has started the Hoa Hao thinking about uniting.

25X1

LAOS

4

All indications point to an imminent cease-fire agreement. Government units in the panhandle are enjoying a respite.

CAMBODIA

5

Government forces are having little success either east or west of the Mekong.

25X1

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

6

Hanoi is asking aid donors to get specific about projects and prices. Italy is prepared to open talks with Hanoi about recognition.

25X1

NORTH VIETNAM

8

Hanoi media continue to stress rebuilding at home.

13 February 1973

25X1

25X1

SOUTH VIETNAM

The Communists are continuing to isolate Kontum City by strongly resisting South Vietnamese efforts to reopen Route 14. Sharp fighting is reported along the highway, the only overland access to the city. South Vietnamese ground units are being supported by tactical air strikes, now dubbed "training missions." Elsewhere, the Communists continued small-scale attacks in widely scattered sectors of the country.

25X1

25X1

13 February 1973

-1-

25X1

25X1

25X1

Hoa Hao Unity Effort

Leaders of six major factions of the Hoa Hao sect, apparently prompted by the cease-fire agreement and the prospect of a political struggle with the Communists, have signed a proclamation calling for unity. This is the first time that these leaders have agreed to sign a joint statement; it could signal an end to the years of squabbling among their factions. One of the leaders told the US Embassy that the prospect of Communist political agitation and possible intensified terrorism had convinced the factions that they must forget their old differences and band together for their own protection. Another leader described the joint proclamation as akin to a "cease-fire" and said that a real political agreement among Hoa Hao factions remains to be accomplished. He predicted, however, that the two major Hoa Hao political groups would soon unite.

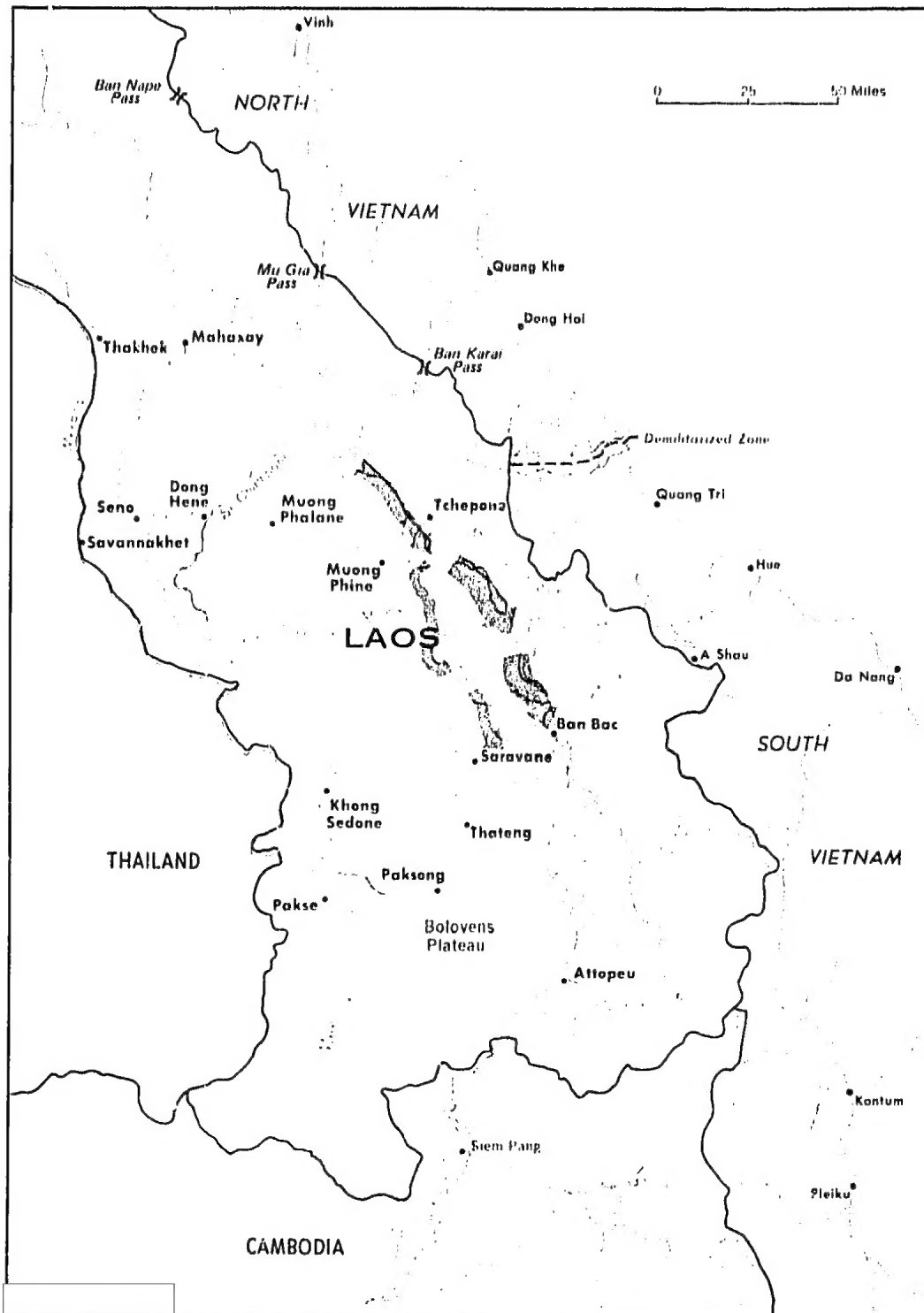
If the Hoa Hao do manage to set up a unified organization, it would be a significant force in the southern part of the country. The Hoa Hao sect has a following of some one half million people and has considerable strength in several Mekong Delta provinces. Those participating in the effort range from government supporters to opposition groups. There is no indication what line the merged organization would take.

25X1

13 February 1973

-2-

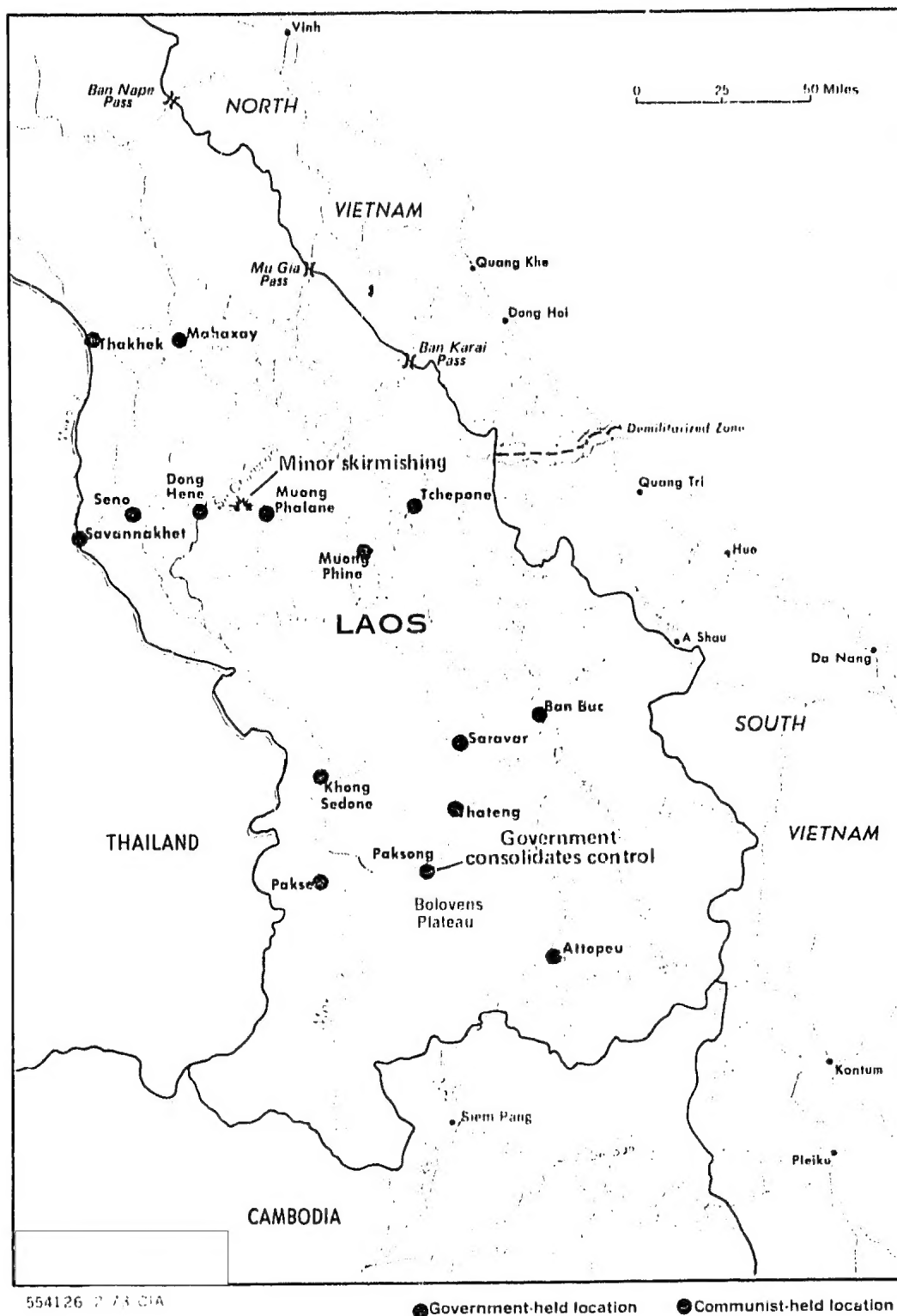
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25X1

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25X1

25X1

LAOS

The delegates at the formal session of the Vientiane peace talks on 13 February merely went through the motions, while the hard daily bargaining continued between senior Lao Communist negotiator Phoumi Vongvichit and government plenipotentiary Pheng Phongsavan. Recent activity suggests that an agreement may be imminent. Deputy Prime Minister Leum Insisienmay flew to Pakse over the weekend for consultations with Boum Oum na Champassak, the titular leader of the rightists, and the Lao Army general staff worked late into the night of 12 February allegedly preparing ceasefire instructions for government units.

25X1

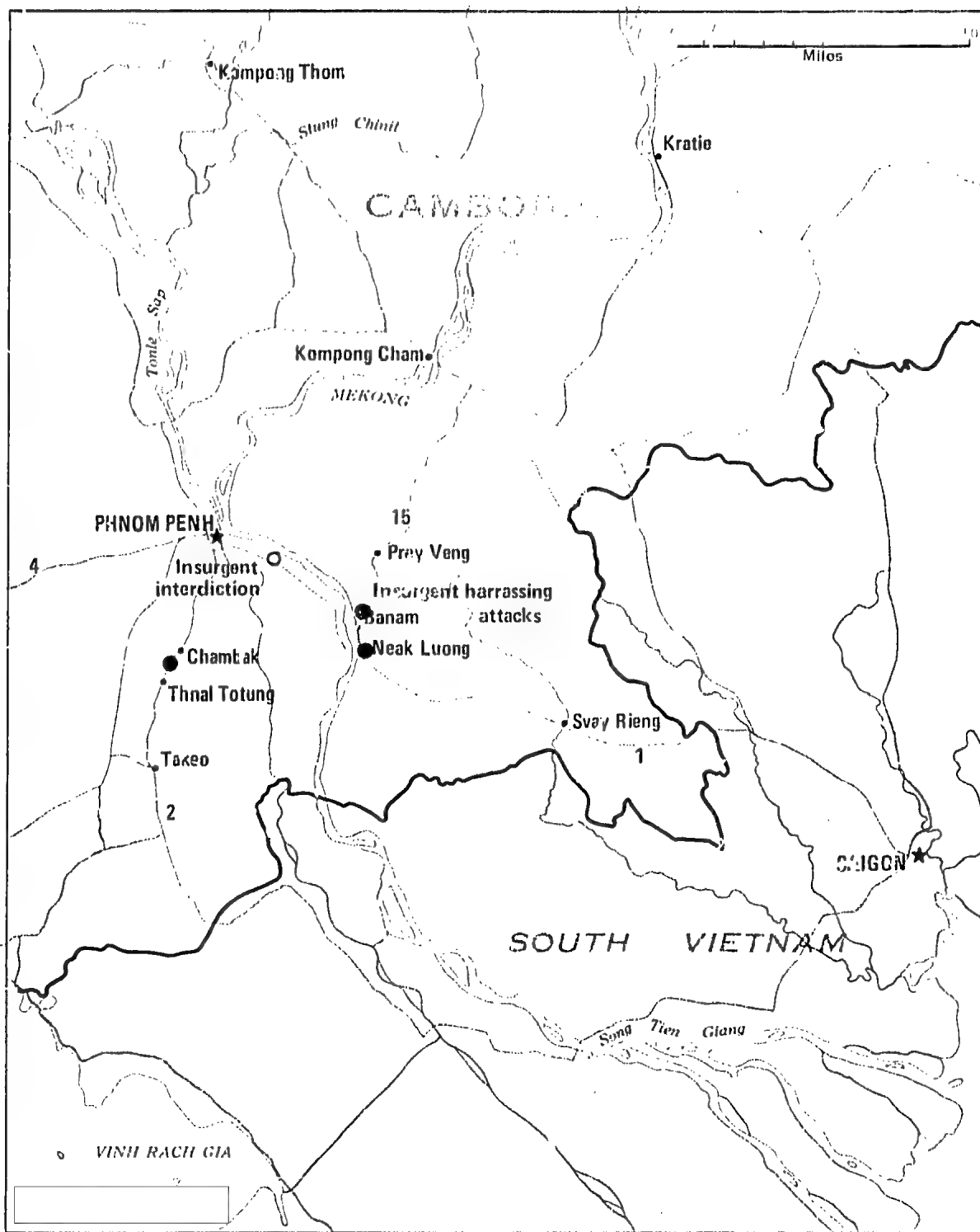
A Breather in the South

Intense bombing during the past week has won a respite for government units in the panhandle. The anticipated counterattacks against government units that retook Paksong on the central Bolovens Plateau on 12 February have not yet materialized, and the irregulars are consolidating their hold over the town.

25X1

13 February 1973

25X1



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25X1

25X1

CAMBODIA

Government troops backed by fire support from the Cambodian Navy are making little headway in efforts to regain the military initiative east of the Mekong River in the vicinity of Neak Luong and Banam. Khmer insurgent forces reportedly still hold Banam and are shelling government defensive positions along Route 15 north of that village. They are also shelling Cambodian positions in and near Neak Luong. West of the Mekong, the government has sent in an additional infantry battalion and a squadron of armored personnel vehicles to help clear a section of Route 1 between Phnom Penh and the river. At last report, however, the insurgents were effectively resisting the drive to reopen the highway.

South of Phnom Penh, insurgent elements on 12 February probed six Cambodian positions on Route 2 between the small towns of Chambak and Thnal Totung. These actions may be designed to keep government troops in that area tied down while the insurgents move supplies across the highway. This flurry of activity also is likely to complicate government attempts farther south to reopen Route 2 between Takeo and the South Vietnam border. [REDACTED]

25X1

25X1

13 February 1973

-5-

25X1

25X1

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hanoi has given some indication of how it will handle the numerous offers of aid coming from other countries. On 1 February, a North Vietnamese official in Paris informed the French Government [redacted]

25X1

25X1

[redacted] that on gift items it should submit a list of products it is prepared to offer and Hanoi will choose from that list. With regard to aid projects, Paris was told to indicate clearly the terms and amounts of the loans and Hanoi would then make a selection.

The North Vietnamese official, commenting on the large number of countries offering aid, said that from Hanoi's point of view, it would be inefficient if France and the other countries were to choose their projects. He also said that North Vietnam will not show its reconstruction plans to French or other foreign officials.

Hanoi's response to the French helps explain its recent testiness with the Japanese. Tokyo has indicated in general terms its intention to provide aid, but has not presented any specific plans. The instructions to the French also support other indications that Hanoi prefers aid on a bilateral basis rather than on the multinational basis that the Japanese prefer.

25X1

The Race to Recognize

Italy appears to be moving faster than its EC colleagues on establishing diplomatic relations with North Vietnam, according to a [redacted] State Department cable. Rome will agree to begin talks in Peking on 15 February if Hanoi insists, although the Italians

25X1

13 February 1973

25X1

25X1

have proposed beginning after the Vietnam conference
opens in Paris on 26 February.

25X1

25X1

13 February 1973

-7-

25X1

25X1

NORTH VIETNAM

The North Vietnamese media are continuing to stress the line that reconstruction at home is the North's primary task. An editorial in the party daily on 12 February, for instance, claimed that the Paris agreement marked the third major turning point in the revolution; the first two being the founding of the DRV in 1945 and the end of the war against France in 1954. In the "new phase," the North will work on the building of socialism, "the development of new methods, and the creation of new men," while South Vietnam's task will be to "consolidate peace, and build an independent and democratic political system and a full national economy and culture." The editorial acknowledged that southerners "still have to continue their struggle studded with difficulties and hardships," but should work within the framework of peace and national concord.

25X1

13 February 1973

25X1